STAT
Declassified in Part - Sanitized Copy Approved for Release 2012/02/09 : CIA-RDP90-00965R000504160034-2

WASHINGTON POST
8 February 1987

A Fan Letter to the CIA's Bill Casey

By Herbert E. Meyer

WASHINGTON is the sort of town where a discussion of Babe Ruth's baseball career would focus on the number of times he struck out. So it isn't surprising that the current avalanche of articles, commentaries and television features on William J. Casey's tenure as director of Central Intelligence have focused on those covert actions which went awry.

Bill Casey always swung from the heels. That is how you hit home runs. Alas, in the intelligence business only the strike-outs are public.

I worked with Bill Casey for four years at the CIA, and I'm still bound by a secrecy oath. So all I can do here is assert without giving evidence that Bill Casey's batting average was very high, and there are too many people in this town who are not exactly distinguishing themselves by remaining silent about it.

They could at least point out that Bill rebuilt our country's covert-action capability just about single-handedly, restoring our ability to respond to situations that require more than diplomacy but less than war.

In any case, Bill's achievements go far beyond covert activities. The overwhelming majority of Bill Casey's time and energy was, in point of fact, devoted to improving analysis.

For instance, he pushed the entire U.S. intelligence community into new areas of research.

He cooked up the idea for the first-ever National Intelligence Estimate on the future of Soviet science. This was, of course, an extraordinarily vague and amorphous issue to tackle, and time and again we came to Bill to bemoan our progress—or lack thereof.

"Look, boys," he would say, "just do the best you can. We'll see where our own gaps are, and then we'll figure out how to fill them. Don't worry if the estimate isn't perfect. This is our first shot. We'll use it to organize ourselves and three years from now we'll do another estimate. Just keep going."

It takes guts for an intelligence chief to order up a report explicitly to show his organization's gaps and shortcomings.

There's been much criticism of an intelligence chief who has such a close relationship as Bill Casey has had with President Reagan. But it is precisely because they know one another so well that the director had no fears that some political enemy would get hold of a report to try and discredit him at the White House.

Under Bill's direction, we launched a major effort to put the analysts in touch with new sources.

"Get these guys out there," Bill ordered time and again. "Find out where the best thinking is on this subject, and I don't care if it's in the government, outside the government or in some other country. We don't have to agree with everything we hear; I just want to make sure we're aware of all the thinking going on out there."

The effort bore results. To cite one example, we discovered that while we were the best bean-counters—totallers of production rates of Soviet tanks, ships, airplanes, bullets and so forth—some academic experts were ahead of us in thinking about the implications of all these weapons. We finally got our act together and, with their help and much of our own intellectual blood on the carpet, we moved beyond bean-counting to produce the first estimate of the Soviet Union's overall capability to project conventional power into the Third World.

Because he played such a key role in the Administration's deliberations, Bill had a unique feel for what his policymaking colleagues were going to need, and when. As a good intelligence officer, he usually knew it before they did.

Time and again my colleagues and I would get word that the director was in his car, en route back from the White House, and would we please be waiting in his office when he arrived. He would come in without saying a word, hang up his hat and coat, settle into his blue swivel chair. He would sit there in absolute silence, pursing his lips, rolling his large head from side to side, twisting hell out of a paper clip while he got his thoughts in order.

"You know, boys, I think about three months from now the White House is going to be making some decisions about ———. What have we got going on this?" We'd tell him what we had going, and more often than not he'd bounce that twisted clip off his desk and lunge forward in his chair.

"What the hell are we, some kind of goddam think tank? I'm telling you that ——— will be at the top of the agenda in 90 days. Now, let's figure out what the president's going to need and then figure out how to do it."

So we'd sit there—sometimes for a long while—and define the various intelligence products that the president, the vice president, the secretaries of state and defense, the national security adviser, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs and so on were going to need to make the decisions that Bill knew they would be making. Then we'd shuffle our pro-

Declassified in Part - Sanitized Copy Approved for Release 2012/02/09 : CIA-RDP90-00965R000504160034-2

Declassified in Part - Sanitized Copy Approved for Release 2012/02/09 : CIA-RDP90-00965R000504160034-2

duction schedules to assure delivery of the right products at the right time. That's the way the system is supposed to work and under Bill's direction, it did.

Of course, just flinging the stuff out the door and hoping for the best is not enough. You send an estimate to one or another Cabinet secretary, and it lands on the desk of some third principal deputy special assistant. If he reads it, he writes a covering memo and passes it on to the second principal deputy special assistant, who ignores it or puts his own memo on top of the one already there. And so on—certainly in Washington and, I deeply hope and believe, in Moscow.

Because Bill was the bureaucratic equivalent of a Stealth bomber, no one could shoot him down before he reached his target.

Sometimes Bill would deliver an estimate himself. On occasion he took along the analysts who prepared the estimate, who in turn carried with them whatever charts, photographs, even videotapes Bill thought would get the message through to a policymaker who wouldn't sit still long enough to read the estimate itself. And he forced them to confront the intelligence, which is one part of the director's job that receives far too little attention.

He was an astoundingly well-informed director. His range of contacts is incredible—he seems to know everyone on earth who has ever accomplished anything noteworthy. And he worked hard at staying in touch with people whose judgments he respected regardless of whether they were in or out of power, anonymous or well-known, young or old.

Most of all, in an age when so many people consider themselves experts on a subject because they once watched a television feature about it, Bill Casey is a serious reader. Those piles of books on his desk weren't there to impress visitors. He plowed through books with the enthusiasm of a child working his way through a package of Oreo cookies; he only stopped when none was left, and then only to stock up for another binge. Paul Johnson's "Modern Times," Jane Jacobs' "Cities and the Wealth of Nations," Edward Crankshaw's "Shadow of the Winter Palace," all of P.T. Bauer's works on economic development, Norman Davies' "Heart of Europe"—these are the kinds of books that Bill gobbled up night after night, then brought in the next mornings to pass on to whoever happened to walk into his office first. When he gave you a book, he expected you to read it that same evening; that's what he usually did when you gave him a book.

Moreover, there are several dozen domestic and foreign publications to which Bill Casey is the world's only known subscriber. He carried four briefcases that were forever bulging with magazines and newsletters that no one on the staff had ever heard of. During meetings, he would ask our opinions of a relevant article in the latest issue of The Something Monthly. After a couple of seconds of dead silence he would leap out of his chair, rifle through one briefcase after another until he had found the issue he wanted, then fling it at one of us while muttering, "How the hell can I work with guys who don't read?"

On most days he had more appointments than your average Washington pediatrician, so there was rarely much time just to sit around and chew the fat. But when a lunch downtown was canceled, or when there was a gap between the day's last meeting and departure time for the first of the receptions he planned to attend with Mrs. Casey, anyone lucky enough to stop by could enjoy a few minute of relaxed conversation with one of the smartest, shrewdest, wittiest men ever to pass through official Washington.

I only wish more people could have seen this side of him. For if there is anything more challenging or more, well, fun than sitting around and talking about the world with Bill Casey, I sure haven't found it.

Herbert E. Meyer was special assistant to the director of Central Intelligence and then vice chairman of the National Intelligence Council. His book, "Real-World Intelligence," will be published later this year.

Declassified in Part - Sanitized Copy Approved for Release 2012/02/09 : CIA-RDP90-00965R000504160034-2